



October 9, 2019

Lisa Herbold, Councilmember District 1  
600 Fourth Avenue, 2nd Floor  
Seattle, WA 98104

Sent via E-mail: [lisa.herbold@seattle.gov](mailto:lisa.herbold@seattle.gov)

RE: SR 99/West Seattle Traffic

Dear Councilmember Herbold,

Thank you for your October 4 letter sharing your concerns regarding the West Seattle Bridge and the reinstallation of the NB SR 99 bus-only lane north of the West Seattle Bridge. The decision-making process for the removal and re-installation of the bus-only lane was made in coordination with our transportation agency partners. SDOT, the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) and King County Metro (Metro) made a joint decision to restore this bus-only lane in support of the 12 bus routes carrying approximately 30,000 people to and from downtown Seattle each weekday. The lane was originally installed to help provide transit reliability as WSDOT worked to demolish the Alaskan Way Viaduct and construct the new tunnel and Metro had identified the removal of the bus lane as a bus reliability challenge.

We recognize that the re-installation of the bus-only lane has had traffic impacts on all commuters to and from West Seattle, including people riding buses. To address these issues while still gaining the bus reliability benefits, we will be adjusting the lane this weekend to give people driving more time to merge before the bus-only lane begins. This work will occur during WSDOT's planned closure of northbound SR 99 to complete repair work inside the tunnel. SDOT crews will begin working on Saturday, October 12 and plan to complete the bus lane modification work by the time the NB SR 99 tunnel reopens at 4 AM on Monday, October 14. We are coordinating this work with the planned tunnel work this weekend to minimize impacts to the traveling public.

Regarding delegation of authority, SDOT is generally responsible for operating and maintaining this section of SR 99, but WSDOT remains responsible for the asset (i.e., major maintenance and replacement) and retains decision authority over changes to operation (i.e., changes to channelization or signal operations directly affecting the facility). SDOT has worked collaboratively with WSDOT to design the revised channelization.

As we prepare for [tolling to begin in the SR 99 tunnel on November 9](#), we are committed to providing a reliable commute for those 30,000 daily bus riders to and from West Seattle. When tolling begins and for at least two years following, WSDOT expects travelers will adjust their travel patterns before settling into a new normal. Based on conservative modeling conducted by WSDOT and their experiences on SR-520, we are prepared for anywhere between 30-50% initial diversion and we have strategies in place to manage our transportation system and right-of-way during times of congestion, including customized signal plans on congested corridors and continued investment in transit. The shared commitment with our transportation agency partners is to monitor and make adjustments in order to support transit

during the Seattle Squeeze and with an eye towards the January 2020 opening of the Columbia St two-way transit pathway.

Specifically, SDOT uses our Transportation Operations Center (TOC) to actively monitor traffic on NB SR 99 and on the West Seattle Bridge, as well as gathering traffic data in critical locations. This capability was critical during the October 9 collision involving a dump truck going through the center barrier that shut down traffic in both directions for over two hours. Metro collects bus travel time and reliability data regularly, and WSDOT gathers data on the broader freeway system, including I-5 and SR 99. Together, we utilize this data to make operations and traffic management decisions. As drivers and buses get used to the restored bus-only lane, we will continue working with our partners to ensure buses are able to move along that pathway. We look forward to the opening of the [Columbia St two-way transit pathway](#) and Alaskan Way for buses, which will help provide an improved transit experience for our riders.

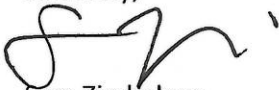
In addition to the day-to-day monitoring we do of the transportation network, we are also monitoring our constantly evaluating system over time. Prior to the closure of the Alaskan Way Viaduct in January, WSDOT established a multi-agency performance data collection and reporting platform. This information captures WSDOT, Metro, Sound Transit and SDOT traffic volumes, ridership and travel times for all modes in the network and is central to our understanding of how traffic is evolving given the significant changes in the network. WSDOT will maintain these performance monitoring reports for a year after the start of tolling to help us jointly evaluate the impact of tolling, which we anticipate will change over time, and will include the period after West Seattle buses transition onto Alaskan Way.

Given the challenges that West Seattle bus riders have experienced this year, we will be watching closely to see how the new pathway improves travel times and reliability for these riders and to identify and implement signal and operational changes, as needed. The opening of the Columbia St two-way transit pathway in January is only the first step towards improving the experience for these riders. Reconstruction of Alaskan Way, which is estimated to take two years, will ultimately deliver dedicated transit lanes between SR 99 and Columbia St.

Thank you again for your inquiry and ongoing engagement. We will also respond to the constituent concerns that you have referred to us with the information in this letter as well as posting an update to the SDOT blog and sharing with media outlets. We appreciate your continued engagement with our department on the issues that matter to your constituents.

If you have further questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sam Zimbabwe', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Sam Zimbabwe  
Director